

## PRAGMATIC STRATEGIES IN THE USE OF KISWAHILI DEMONSTRATIVES

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“If any of them can explain it,” said Alice...”I give him sixpence. I don’t believe there’s an atom of meaning in it.”

The jury all wrote down on their slates, “she doesn’t believe there’s an atom of meaning in it ...”

If there’s no meaning in it, “said the King, “that saves a world of trouble, you know, as we needn’t try to find any. And yet I don’t know, “he went on...looking at them with one eye; “I seem to see some meaning in them, after all...”

*Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*

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This paper focuses on two spatial Kiswahili demonstratives. In Kiswahili, demonstratives have been traditionally treated as morphosyntactic elements that modulate various elements and realize emphatic function. Demonstratives have also been studied as elements that express and facilitate cohesive relations and elements that realize deictic functions in discourse.

In this paper we look at Kiswahili demonstratives as used in the standard Kiswahili language in Nairobi city. We argue that besides the traditionally recognized functions, demonstratives in standard Kiswahili are also used to pass subtle discourse messages which can only be explained by taking into account the pragmatic strategies employed in the use of the demonstratives in specific discourse settings.

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### 1. Introduction

Demonstratives have been traditionally treated as elements that realize the grammatical function of deixis (Lyons 1968; 1977; Hofmann 1993; Levinson 1983; Marmaridou 2000). In Standard Kiswahili, demonstratives have been studied as an aspect of the Kiswahili morphosyntactic system (Myachina 1981; Polomé 1967; Ashton 1944; Mgullu 2001; Habwe & Karanja 2004; Mohammed 2001; Mbaabu 2000). In this paper, we look at how Kiswahili demonstratives are used as pragmatic strategies in Kiswahili language to convey implied meaning.

Because we are largely interested in what is implied by demonstratives and not what is said (in terms of propositional meaning), we shall find the Gricean implicature theory most appropriate. The theory is useful to us because it centralizes the idea of speaker meaning and context of situation. The Gricean approach was formulated in a seminal paper published by Paul Grice in 1975. According to Grice (1975) there is a difference between conventional linguistic

meaning and speaker meaning in a discourse situation. The difference between speaker-meaning which is the basis of establishing pragmatic undercurrents, is determined by the cooperative principle, context and rules of interpretation (Searle 1975, 1979; Leech 1983; Gibbs 1987).

Data for this paper was accessed in Nairobi by means of participant observation. Nairobi is Kenya's capital city. As a city, Nairobi constitutes a heterogeneous community with people from varied and diverse linguistic backgrounds. As a result, Nairobi exhibits complex linguistic patterns (Abdulaziz and Osinde 1997). In this paper we are focusing on the Standard Kiswahili. The standard Kiswahili which is Kenya's national language is spoken in Nairobi with varying extents of fluency and competence. Most speakers in Nairobi speak Kiswahili as a second, third or even fourth language. Only a minority of speakers from the Kenya coast, Tanzania coast and the islands of Zanzibar speak Kiswahili as a first language.

## 2. Kiswahili Demonstratives

Kiswahili language has three types of demonstratives classifiable in Kiswahili in terms of their reference function. The Kiswahili demonstratives can refer to a place, object or person in relation to how distal or proximal the object referred to is to the speaker or listener.

The first type of demonstratives are those demonstratives that show that the point of reference is proximal to both speaker and listener. For example:

***Huyu ni mtoto wangu*** (class 1)

This is my child.

***Hapa si petu*** (class 16)

This is not our place.

In the first example, *Huyu* 'this' is a demonstrative referring to a child and the child is understood to be proximal to the speaker and listener. In the second example *Hapa* 'this' refers to a place close to the speaker and listener.

The second type of demonstratives indicates the point of reference to be proximal to the addressee and distal to the speaker. For example:

***Hicho kiti ni chake*** (class 7)

That is his chair (That chair is his).

***Huo mti umeanguka*** (class 3)

That tree has fallen.

In the first example, the chair referred to by *hicho* 'that' is close to the addressee and away from speaker. Similarly, the tree referred to by *huo* 'that' is close to the addressee and distal to the speaker.

The third type of demonstratives shows that the addressee and the addressor are non – proximate to the point of reference. For example:

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***Kule*** *kunawaka moto* ( class 17)

That place is on fire.

***Kile*** *kitamwangukia* (class 7)

That will fall on him.

In the first example, the place being referred to is away from the speaker and addressee hence the use of *kule* there. In the second example the object being referred to is also away from the speaker and addressee. You will notice that in all the cases, the demonstratives agree with the class markers of various classes depending on what they are referring to.

Kiswahili demonstratives are sometimes used to point to parts of a text in which case they are said to be performing cohesive functions. Otherwise when Kiswahili demonstratives point to an object in the context of situation they are said to be performing a deictic function (Njue 1989; Habwe 1998)

Like other Bantu languages, Kiswahili has a nominal class system. The nominal class system is used as a basis for determining concordial agreement. Some elements of the Kiswahili sentence agree with the subject through concordial agreement markers based on the classes to which the relevant nominal expressions belong. Kiswahili demonstratives concordially reflect the class of the nominal expressions in which they occur while performing their function in relation to the textual or non-textual domain of reference.

### 3. Kiswahili Demonstratives as Discourse Elements

The Kiswahili demonstratives that are of concern to us in this appear are the spatial demonstrative, *kule* ‘over there’ and *hapa* ‘here’. *Kule* ‘over there’ expresses a relationship that indicates that the place of reference that is away from both the speaker and the listener. On the other hand *hapa* ‘here’ indicates that the spatial point is proximate to the speaker, but or may not be proximate to the ( intended ) hearer.

The use of these demonstratives in discourse raises some questions that are of interest to a discourse analyst. Through participant observation, we noted that speakers used *hapa* ‘here’ to refer to places non proximate to both speaker and hearer. A common use of this strategy was observed on *matatus* (shared public taxis). For example, a conversation would ensue as follows.

- |                                |                          |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|
| A. <i>Unakwenda wapi?</i>      | Where are you going?     |
| B. <i>Ninakwenda hapa</i>      | I’m going here           |
| A. <i>Wapi?</i>                | Where?                   |
| B. <i>Hapa hapa Kawangware</i> | Just here at Kawangware  |
| A. <i>Lete ishirini</i>        | Bring twenty (shillings) |

A passenger who is negotiating for a reduction of bus fare may refer to Kawangware ( a residential area located ten kilometres from Nairobi city centre) as *hapa* ‘here’. By so doing the passenger attempts to linguistically minimize the distance from Nairobi city to Kawangware.

Such passenger can be said to have flouted the quality maxim of the cooperative principle (Grice 1975; Levinson 1983; Leech 1983) which requires a (cooperative) speaker to tell the truth or, at least, not to say what he/ she believes to be untrue.

You will notice that when the passengers refers to Kawangware as *hapa* ‘here’ the conductor ignores the implied short distance and insist on the normal fare of twenty shillings. It is interesting to note that in his mitigation the passenger says *hapa hapa Kawangware* – ‘just here at Kawangware’. When the demonstrative is reduplicated, the distance is even further (linguistically) minimized.

There are times when bus conductors yield to the plea and the pressure of the demonstrative strategy. When it happens, the conductors agree to take bus fare appropriate for *hapa* ‘here’ instead of *kule* ‘over there’. The passenger, therefore, travels to *kule* ‘over there’ and pays for *hapa* ‘here’. This looks like a bargaining strategy. Underlying, it looks more of a plea meted out to a bus conductor, who knows the activated elements of the context. Such context clues may be for instance that the passenger may be a lowly paid construction worker who commutes to Kawangware from the city centre. The *matatu* conductor may soften his stand on that score.

It is interesting to note that on the contrary if one decided to walk to Kawangware on foot and met a friend or relative who asked where he was going he would say *ninaenda hapa Kawangware* – ‘I am going here at Kawangware.’ This is done perhaps so that the speaker does not make his listener feel empathetic over his predicament – something that would burden the listener if it is said in self consolation. Note that *hapa* ‘here’ in this case is only used when the speaker is not bargaining for anything or when he/she does not wish to be assisted by the listener in any way. He would simply wish to show that his distance, though long anyway, is manageable. Whatever the reason for this inverted use of the spatial demonstratives, it is really common in use within Nairobi. The application of the grammatically known demonstratives is the exception rather than the norm.

The discourse game played in such a situation can be formalized as follows:

Speaker S says X to hearer H

Hearer H hears X

However, in context C, speakers S wants hearer H to perceive Y

Hearer H in context C, believes that speaker S wants him to perceive Y

So hearer H perceives Y (and acts accordingly)

In the foregoing example speaker B says X but he means Y. Although he refers to his destination as *hapa* ‘here’, he means *kule* ‘there’ and refers to *kule* ‘there’ as ‘here’ *hapa*. The meaning intended by the speaker is arrived at by considering the context of utterance and the cooperative principle. A similar exploit of the quality maxim was observed when two boys were traveling

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- A. *Tunakwenda wapi?*                      Where are we going?  
B. *Hapa tu*                                      (We are going) just here.  
A. *Wapi?*                                        Where?  
B. *Majengo*                                      Majengo  
A. *Haya*    Okay

Majengo may not be *hapa* ‘here’ thus flouting the quality maxim of the co operative principle. It may require contextual clues to derive the implicative intended by speaker. In this case, A and B are young men. B wants A to accompany him to some place. However, because he is suspicious that the place may be far away, he asks B to say where they are going. Boy B knows that a straight forward answer may not yield results that are favourable to him. Boy B knows that to communicate effectively, he has to adherer to the co-operative principle. However, one of the maxims of the cooperative principle *must* be breached and this is the truth maxim. The breach of this maxim may not mean miscommunication. Boy B tells boy A *hapa tu* ‘(we are just going) just here’.

Note that the violation of the truth maxim is prompted by the need to be more persuasive. As in the fare negotiation above, B tries to reduce the distance psychologically. The use of *kule* ‘over there’ would signify a long distance and boy A would perhaps change his mind and refuse to accompany boy B. However, through the use of *hapa* ‘here’, the distance is linguistically and, therefore emotionally reduced and negotiated until Boy A gives consent. Such language strategies are so powerful that they influence how people look at reality. When a long distance is referred to as *hapa* ‘here’ even if it is actually *kule* ‘over there’, the mind is influenced to adjust and perceive it more positively. Many a time in Nairobi when somebody is waiting for another, the person being waited for would remark *niko hapa* ‘I am right here’ just to keep the other party waiting. It is the same strategy for keeping somebody waiting. The truth of the matter may be the person could be very far away. The strategy is only used to mean ‘please wait’. Kress and Hodge (1979), following Whorf, have argued that the linguistic operations we make ( i.e. the language games we play) largely influence our world view. This is what happens in Kiswahili discourse. The pragmatic strategies used influence how Kiswahili speakers view reality. Further observation in Nairobi reveals that the demonstrative *kule* ‘over there’, which signifies a situation where the point of reference is distal to both the addresser and addressee is used non conventionally with some speaker – meaning. The following conversation was noted in Nairobi between a boss (B) and his secretary (S).

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B. <i>Umechelewa kwa nini?</i>	Why are you late?
S. <i>Ninaishi mbali</i>	I stay far away
B. <i>Unaishi wapi?</i>	Where do you stay?
S. <i>Ninaishi kule</i>	I stay there ( far away)
B. <i>Kule wapi</i>	Where is there?
S. <i>Kule Eastleigh?</i>	There in Eastleigh
B. <i>Uangalie wakati, tafadhali</i>	Be watchful of time, please

In this conversation between a boss and his secretary, one notices an interesting use of a demonstrative as pragmatic strategy. Note that when the secretary is asked where she lives, she violates the quality maxim by not giving full information of the actual name of the place where she lives. She instead chooses to use a demonstrative, which does not provide sufficient information in this discourse. However, we recognize her strategy when we realize that the use of the demonstrative ‘over there’ gives the secretary the chance to signal only the non proximate nature of the distance without giving her boss a chance to tell exactly how far away it is. If she had said *ninaishi Eastleigh* ‘I stay in Eastleigh’, the boss would have treated Eastleigh as *hapa* ‘here’ and therefore the secretary would have had no convincing excuse for her lateness. Eastleigh is one of the estates close to the Nairobi city centre. By referring to Eastleigh simply as *kule* ‘over there’, she violates both the quality and quantity maxim of the co-operative principle. By so doing the secretary produces a more persuasive utterance and succeeds in making an acceptable apology in spite of her boss feeling that she could still do better in keeping time. If the boss’s were to reject the use of *kule* ‘over there’ in a place where *hapa* ‘here’ would have been more appropriate, the secretary would have a less acceptable apology and probably face disciplinary action. On this occasion, she has won the language game and with that victory, saved her face at the very minimum

The use of demonstratives in real discourse situations has seriously complicated their earlier referred to grammatical meaning. One can look at other incidences of pragmatic use of these reference items that are non-spatial.

Sometimes two people may be engaged in an argument. The two may be sitting in one place. The two people disagreeing use *hayo mawazo* ‘those ideas’ against one another instead of *haya mawazo* ‘these ideas’ to show distance between them. However if they were agreeing with each other, *haya mawazo* ‘these ideas’ would be used to show minimized distance between them. An even more illustrious example would be between a father and a mother – all sitting at table with an errant son. The father would tell his wife, *mtoto huyo wako* ‘that son of yours’ rather than *huyu mtoto wako* ‘this son of yours’ hence using the demonstratives to show distance and an impolite feeling he may be having for his errant son.

It can be argued that the use of demonstratives in standard Kiswahili in Nairobi is not fully congruent with their traditional grammatical meaning. They are easily manipulated to achieve varied effects to the listener, chief among them being to bargain and persuade, argue, show

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distance, hate or love, and may be used for self consolation. Like other deictic expressions they do not have fixed meaning hence making them easy to use for varied meanings which are only accessible in the specific context of situations of their use.

### 4. Conclusion

Although Kiswahili demonstratives have been traditionally studied in terms of their basic referential and morphosyntactic functions, little attention, if any has been paid to the pragmatics of their use in authentic discourse settings. In this a paper we have looked at the pragmatic strategies employed by Kiswahili speakers in Nairobi to make demonstratives facilitate the specific perlocutionary acts (e.g. persuasion) performed by the speakers in various communicative domains. Specifically we have discussed the use of two spatial demonstrative *kule* 'there' and *hapa* 'here', in different settings where it was not in the interest of the speakers to use them according to their basic referential functions. We have seen that both in bargaining for a better *matatu* fare and in giving an excuse for lateness at ones place of work, Nairobi Kiswahili speakers use spatial demonstratives strategically in order to place the discourse in the fluid world of emotion and persuasion. Reason and hard facts give way to subjective interpersonal influence. These findings are consistent with Levinson's observation (1983:81) that the use of demonstratives is often complicated by some emotional factors such a empathy. Our study clearly shows that the use of demonstratives can be pragmatically manipulated to influence the rules and results of the language game played in a given discourse setting.

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